


THE KENYAN WOMAN:  
HER HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STATE

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# **The Kenyan Woman: Her Historical Relationship with the State**

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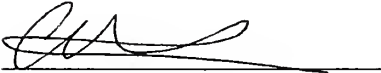



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## **Abstract**

The historical relationship between the Kenyan state and women provides lessons and insight as to how women in a colonized state relate to the government and the gains, or lack thereof, that exist. Kenyan women were critical in the nationalist movement that intensified in the 1950s, culminating in independence in 1963. Some women fought in the forests and others were information and food distributors. Many women played a role in furthering the nationalist movement. Independence promised fruits that few women received. Through a historical analysis and an understanding of two women's organizations in Kenya, Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization and The Green Belt Movement, this research analyzes the methods in which Kenyan women have related to the state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One major lesson is that Kenyan women have often been used as tools in accomplishing their male counterparts' goals and then left behind without reward. Since the 1990s, there has been a shift in women's relation to the state, including opposition to the government in office and uniting with men to fight against the ruling of President Moi. This research illustrates that women cannot rely on their government to keep its promises even when they have been instrumental in achieving monumental goals, such as independence. Kenya is still very much a patriarchal society and women must recognize the existence of this institution and use their agency to fight and/or work with it to accomplish their goals. The women's movement in Kenya must grow in strength and unity. In many ways, Kenyan women have found means of survival, with and most often without the state. But if they are to improve their relationship to the state and gain political power, they must organize and fight united.



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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Methodology and Theory.....	7
Gender Frameworks.....	7
Women and the State.....	10
Historical Perspective.....	14
History.....	17
Role of Land.....	18
Women's Role in Kenyan History.....	19
Kenyan Women and the Mau Mau.....	22
Presidential Eras.....	24
Women's Organizations: Meeting Their Own Needs.....	26
MYW.....	26
The Two Divisions of MYW.....	29
Post-Independence Governance.....	29
The Green Belt Movement.....	35
Conclusion.....	38
References.....	41





## Introduction

From Wangari Maathai, 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner,<sup>1</sup> to the woman with a hoe tending the land, Kenyan women have a deep political history. Some are directly involved in government and politics, while others, through social organizing and community activities, have dealt with the lack of government intervention in their lives. Kenya as a state is only forty six years old, gaining independence from the British in December 1963 (Mutua 2008: 61). However, the history of the Kenyan people expands beyond the colonial period.

Kenya's political history provides an interesting case study of women's role in politics and their relationship to government. This study examines the political relationship between African, Kenyan-born men and women in history, with an emphasis on how the native Kenyan woman has related to the Kenyan political system. In doing this research, the emphasis is on both the direct and indirect relationship women have with the state, including women's organizing in supplement of government's unfilled roles. In this study I will examine two women's organizations: Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYW hereon) and The Greenbelt Movement (GBM hereon).

This study begins with a theoretical analysis on various theories useful to understanding the Kenyan case. These include historical perspectives, gender analysis, the patriarchal structure, women's relation to the state and women's organizations. This chapter is followed by a historical review and analysis of Kenya in the twentieth century. The historical review chapter examines some of the colonial and post-colonial relationships between Kenyan women and the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/)



state. Then, there is an analysis of MYW and GBM, which demonstrates two distinct paths taken by women's organizations in Kenya. A conclusion provides the lessons learned and a summation of the relationship between Kenyan women and the state. In most Kenyan political circumstances, women have been utilized to accomplish their male counterparts' goals with promises of gains that are often unrealized. The past provides the potential to empower today's Kenyan woman. In essence, this research answers the following question: What has the Kenyan state promised and/or done for the Kenyan woman?; What should the Kenyan woman expect of her state and how can she change her relation to it?



## **Methodology and Theory**

This research follows a qualitative method. I utilized academic journals and books to gain insight into the lives of Kenyan women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The research process brought me to various key texts that mainly inform this study. These texts, especially Kanogo (1987) and Presley (1992), were purposefully chosen because their centralization of women's roles in Kenya. Research led me to recognize that women's role within the Kenyan state is limited; a main reason there is no chapter specifically on women in government. Furthermore, these women are the exception and not the rule. This is not to demean the progress made by some women who are in power but rather to provide an opportunity to focus on the majority and not the minority.

Recognizing the limited roles women played directly in government led to the unraveling of the role of women's organizations. From informal networks of five friends to the MYW and GBM explored in this text, women's organizations are powerful tools that help women gain the resources they need and organize for their concerns, many of which the state is not forced to address. With a focus on the historical relationship of Kenyan women and the state, I begin the theoretical discussion on gender frameworks.

The different theories proposed in this chapter offer analytical lens in which to critically examine the case of Kenyan women and the state. This case is as much about the relationship of the state and women as it is women and men. The state operates under a patriarchal system and it is thus crucial to understand in order to comprehend and contextualize the Kenyan case.

### **Gender Frameworks**

Scholarship illustrates the various ways in which males and females are gendered into men and women (Young 1997; Chodorow 1997; Pateman 1988). There exists, in many





societies, a recognition that “women are fundamentally different from men” (Chodorow 1997: 9). Gender is socially constructed. This means that society itself produces the gendered categories of men and women. That production is partially mediated through the structures of patriarchy (Young 1997). With this understanding, it makes sense that even though men and women live in the same environment, their experience of that environment may differ based on their fundamental gender differences. Young (1997) argues that the differences we see between men and women are a reflection of patriarchal structures that are embedded in society and shapes the relationships between them. In other words, to varying degrees patriarchy prescribes the power relationships shared between men and women.

For the purposes of this study, gender is understood as an analytical, historically contextualized, relational category. Gender helps trace the social construction of men and women over time (Scott 1989). This perspective recognizes that gender relations are not constant. Scott’s work is instrumental in understanding not only the relational manner of gendered categories but also the influence of that gender relationship on the comprehension of history. By understanding history through a gendered perspective, a new understanding of that history is produced. A deconstruction of the gender relationships in the past, including power sharing, can help challenge the gendered relationships of today’s society.

Pateman explores the ways in which patriarchal relations shape the institution of the modern state. She illustrates the differences between men and women through a study of not only the social contract as described by Lockes, Hobbes and Rousseau, but also the sexual contract. The sexual contract is about the origin of political right, as is the social contract. The sexual contract further argues that political right is also patriarchal right, which is the power men exercise over women (Pateman 1988: 1). Pateman also claims that the sexual contract has been



purposefully disregarded in order to avoid consideration of patriarchy's control over women. She says that the control of women is embedded within society by using the social contract to cover up the underlying sexual contract. Her discussion provides insight into the deep-rootedness of patriarchy in society. These patriarchal structures rule the institution of the modern state. If patriarchy is the dominant structure in the modern state, then the role of women is controlled by the power held by men. This is one theoretical argument that offers a perspective in which to understand the modern state and the construction of gender relations in the state. However, it is not to diminish the role women play or their agency within the state and in relation to the state.

With an understanding that patriarchy operates in many societies, including Kenya, gender can be utilized to understand the ways in which men and women operate in society. As Pateman (1988) demonstrates, patriarchal structures aim to give men power and control of women. Gender helps us understand how men and women relate through these systems. Patriarchy is a fact of life for many modern societies and a key to equalizing the relationship between the genders includes understanding the mechanisms in which it works. By locating the structures of male domination, one can identify the ways in which gender differentiations are formed within a particular context. Gender is relational (Elson 1991) and can be used to historically trace the shifts that occur within patriarchal societies.

Even though patriarchal structures exist in many societies today, they are not stagnant and unchanging. Within the institutional structure of patriarchy, agency exists for those with lesser power. Agency is one form in which one can visualize and examine how patriarchy manifests differently depending on the context. Namely, the agency available in any patriarchal society varies, creating a unique experience of patriarchy in that society.



Here it is important to understand some of the major factors that influence Kenya's context. Kenya is a young post-colonial state. Thus, its history, among other post-colonial nations, situates it in a context dissimilar to nations such as the United States. The post-independence governance also affects the way Kenya experiences patriarchy. For Kenyan women, their relationship to the state, men and their environment also affects their gendered identities. Patriarchy is a reality in Kenyan society, and thus a useful method of understanding men and women's different experiences. It must be understood that everyone's social location or every group's social location makes their experiences unique. So even though the study may refer to general experiences, one must be aware that experiences vary for different groups based on their social location. While it is important to consider this difference, it would be impractical to attempt to describe and contextualize the differences experienced by every different potential social location that may exist within Kenya.

### **Women and the State**

There is a long history of scholarship on women and the state. Pateman's discussion of the sexual contract, described earlier, is useful in understanding the history and depth of the patriarchal state. Her work illustrates how societal structures have embedded practices of male power over women (1988). One of the ways in which women and men have been separated is by making the public/private dichotomy, where women are in the private realm of the household and men are in the public arena where political activity and wage production happen. In the 1980s, there was a growth in feminist scholarship that situated the state as central to gender relations, inclusive of those relations within the family unit (Parpart & Staudt 1989).

MacKinnon (1997) is known for her promotion of the idea that the personal, which is mainly associated with women, is also political. This assertion in turn makes the private also the





public. Her work marked a critical point in feminist scholarship on the state because it meant that women's lives and experiences were now part of the state's affairs. MacKinnon demonstrated the interconnectedness between the so called "private" and "public" life. Once these boundaries become blurred and we begin to explore the implications of family life on public life and vice versa, the discussion of patriarchy becomes central. MacKinnon's theory attacks the institutions of patriarchy that seeks to separate women and men into the private and public spheres, respectively. Centralizing women's role within the state begins to unravel patriarchal structures at play.

The African state and its relationship to women is not the same as that described by MacKinnon. The African state has not yet been forced to face and deal with women's problems in a manner that affects how patriarchy, as a system, is used as a political tool (Mikell 1997). This research focuses on the 20<sup>th</sup> century period in Kenya; therefore, I will restrict discussion on women and the African state to this period.

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the African state was in its early period of being colonized by European nations. The colonial state, to a large degree, dictated gender relations in Africa until a nation gained independence, which was not until the 1950s and 60s for most African nations. In early colonial rule, gender relations were prescribed by the needs of the colonial state (Nzomo and Staudt 1994). Colonialists needed a labor force, which was dependent on male migrant labor. As migrant workers, men received wages, while their female counterparts did not. This structure gendered production and reproduction, male and female respectively.

In the 1930s the colonial state's ability to control women began to deteriorate. Women began challenging the state due to their marginalized positions. Both women and men



experienced the state in the context of the colonialists' aim to accumulate capital (Berman and Lonsdale 1992). European nations left a legacy in post-colonial Africa: the institutional gendered differentiation between male production and female reproduction (Staudt and Nzomo 1994: 417-8).

After colonialism, African states have continuously negotiated the control of power and the state. Fatton argues that state power, exercised by the ruling class, expresses their domination and power through "threat and use of direct violence than their moral, material, and intellectual leadership" (1989: 47). As ruling classes in Africa attempt to construct hegemony, women's role is restricted to either becoming a part of the ruling class through a powerful man, or not being involved directly with the state altogether (ibid 48). Fatton argues that the liberation of women in the African state is a struggle against the ruling class. However, some women are attempting to become involved in power through alignment with men of power. Basically, women's access to state resources and power is dependent upon their relationship to men. This access to power is different for various classes of women. In particular, non-elite women cannot participate in the state because they do not have access to men in the ruling class.

Knowing the position of the African state, and women's role in it historically helps recognize some of the reasons women's organizations exist, their purposes and their ability to gain membership. Clearly women's interests are not a priority in the African state. Thus, a formation of women's organizations was and continues to be one way in which women's issues and concerns can be voiced and addressed. In understanding the state's position, one also gains a perspective of the relationship that the state may desire with women's organizations. The state may yearn for the support of women's organizations in state policies. Women are fifty percent of the constituency and thus provide power in their numbers (Nzomo & Staudt 1994). The



state's relationship with women's organizations highly depends on the organization's support or lack of support of state policies and interests. This is visualized in the examination of MYW and GBM.

The African state leaves poor women outside the realm of politics. In other words, their lives are shaped by state policies that impact them even though they may not have input into those policies. However, that is not to exclude the fact that these women have agency and act upon it to better their lives (Nzomo & Staudt 1994: 417). The African state is not particularly concerned with women's needs. Thus, women gain minimally from interacting with the state (Parpart & Staudt 1989: 8). And in fact, due to male domination in politics, women, until recently, have distanced themselves from the state, which had further minimized women's gains from the state through "patronage and distributional benefits" (Nzomo & Staudt 1994: 416).

For various reasons, including marginalization from the state, women organize. Both the colonial and post-colonial periods in Africa illustrate the undermining of women's roles in society structurally. For example, in the colonial period, title deeds began to be issued to men in Kenya. Land in the previously European settler White Highlands was re-allocated to men. These policies, along with others that followed, reduced women's access to economic resources (Nzomo & Staudt 1994; Thomas-Slayter et al 1995: Ch. 2).

Exclusion from the state limits many women's ability to influence the structural circumstances that shape their lives (Bystdzienski and Sekhon 1999: Introduction). Due to a lack of support of women's issues from their respective states, many African women are forging relationships across ethnic groups. Women's position in African nations has depreciated, with increased labor demands, along with a continuous reduction in their access to resources (Thomas-Slayter et al 1995). As women's position becomes marginalized in society at large, it





is vital that women from all locations collaborate to improve their lives and ease some of their burdens (Tripp 2000).

### **Historical Perspective**

In this study I present Kenyan history by utilizing second wave historians, such as Cora Ann Presley (1992), Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (1992), and Tabitha Kanogo (1987). These political scientists and historians introduced a historical analysis that centralizes the African experience in African history. Berman and Lonsdale criticize other Kenyan historians for not enhancing Kenyan history by excluding the seemingly contradictory information that in reality shows the complexity of Kenyan history. Presley (1992) highlights the critical role of women in the anti-colonialist movement and especially in the Mau Mau Rebellion. Her work is influential because not only does it focus on the African experience but also enlightens the reader about the role of women in Kenya's history, an area other second wave historians such as Berman and Lonsdale neglect. Just as Berman and Lonsdale's work is critical in illustrating the role, power and struggle of the African in dealing with the British, Presley emphasizes the African woman's role in this period too. By providing a complex, full history of the Kenyan past, the present-day Kenyans are better able to understand themselves, their past and potential. In producing a history focused on the Kenyan woman, Presley is in essence empowering today's Kenyan woman. Kanogo is insightful in her presentations of the different Kikuyu, Maasai and Kamba experiences in regards to land. She points to the fact that different people, due to location, did not experience land alienation similarly.

While second wave historians have attempted to attack some of the flaws of earlier historians, it is important to note that they too fail in some aspects, one being the minimal or lack of presentation of women, with the exclusion of Presley and Kanogo's work. Early historians



relied on dependency theory in their presentation of African history. Dependency theory helped provide a sharp analysis and critique of imperialism and its production of a “distorted” condition of underdevelopment (Berman and Lonsdale 1992: 179). This perspective allowed for a clean analysis, like a simple equation. As Berman phrases it, all that “was needed was data that showed the results of imperial domination in the distorted structure of the colony as a dependent supplier of primary productions to the metropole and purchaser of manufactures from it” (1992: 179). The bottom line of the dependency theory perspective is that it helped view colonialism from a comfortable distance, in the abstractness of theory, treating Africans as a mass exploited and victimized.

Dependency theory however could not explain some of the ambiguous data that surfaced in studying Kenyan history. First, dependency theory did not allow agency for Africans; they were acted upon by the British (Berman and Lonsdale 1992: 180-1). Secondly, instead of attempting to understand the complex data that was surfacing, dependency theory disregarded this information and its significance to Kenyan history. In other words, dependency theory was utilized to reach a predicted goal. Dependency theory did not provide a complex and realistic representation of Kenyan history, especially as it pertained to the lived experience of Africans because it did not allow an articulation of the relationships of bargaining and coercion between the British and indigenous people of Kenya. The latter relationship and complexity was provided by second wave historians.

The methods employed by second wave historians allow a focus on the ambiguities and discontinuities that characterized relationships among Africans, between different groups of Africans and colonial authorities and between European settlers and colonial authorities (Berman and Lonsdale 1992: 177). These authors have utilized oral and archival sources in understanding



and presenting Kenyan history. Second wave historians' research interests differ greatly but the commonality is that the African and European experience as they lived in the colonial period dictates the outcome of their work. This is a stark change from writers of the first wave. The nuanced understanding of colonial history is important not only because it more accurately conveys Kenyan colonial history, but also provides insight into contemporary politics of East Africa. Second wave historians' work is crucial because its complex, realistic, African-centric outcome can help affect change in African nations today. History has impact and consequence, thus its representation is critical.

Berman and Lonsdale's extensive re-writing of Kenyan history is especially impactful because it provides the present day Kenyan with a perspective of the leadership that their native counterparts utilized in the past. Lonsdale argues that uncensored political activity is essential in mobilizing a state and yielding respect from its citizens for its authority and be the site for creating and imagining of alternative future societies (Berman and Lonsdale 1992: 204). Forward mobility that transcends imperialists' impressions is realized through second wave historians. The outcome of these historians is not a solution for African political dilemmas but rather an approach that will impact history, and thus its use. An important outcome of the second wave historians is a realization that African societies were not romantic, harmonious societies in the past, and neither are they today.

These theories and perspectives are the lens in which I engage in this research. The data below is analyzed through a gendered, historical perspective. This research aims to understand Kenyan women's relation to the state and also project some of what the future may hold. The theories I have described here provide an opportunity to accomplish this task.



## History

The focus of this study is present day Kenya. However, some of the areas I refer to will be outside the boundaries of Kenya as it is known today. East African communities' interaction with Europeans until the 1880s, especially in the inland areas involved trade, exploration and missionary activity. But European interest in East Africa drastically changed towards the end of the 1880s due to the economic possibilities for cheap labor and raw materials on the continent (Ochieng 1985: 81-2). Great Britain declared itself the East African Protectorate in 1895, formalizing British control over East Africa, including present day Kenya (Presley 1992: 3).<sup>2</sup> Between 1895 and 1914, the British fortified their rule upon East Africans, sometimes through force (Ochieng 1985: 88), as Lonsdale illustrates in his study of the politics of conquest in Western Kenya between 1894 and 1908 (Berman and Lonsdale 1992: 45-72).

The early years of British control of Kenya were difficult for both the colonizer and colonized. Many African peoples attempted to resist British penetration, which proved ineffective due to the higher efficiency of British weaponry. This period is best characterized as a tug of war relationship between Africans and the British. The British aimed to control Africans for economic gain, while different Kenyan ethnic groups employed strategies of both resistance and accommodation (Ochieng 1985: 102).

Extracting African labor and raw materials required the British to form a bureaucratic system in Kenya. To establish local power, the British governance began appointing African chiefs with the responsibility of implementing programs initiated by the British colonial government (Ochieng 1985: 106). The British implemented labor laws in attempts to fill the

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<sup>2</sup> This was also due to the Berlin Conference of 1884-5 held among European nations, which required European nations to establish effective political control over a population in order to rule it. In other words, claims to the New World had to be well established (Ochieng 1985: 84).





needs of British settler farms. Land laws were also instituted to expand British land holdings and control Kenyan land distribution. These laws proved very problematic for the state in later years. In fact, the Mau Mau Rebellion, which led to independence, emerged out of colonial restrictions on land and labor (Kanogo 1987; Ochieng 1985 and Presley: 1992). In these early days of colonialism, land and its control developed as the main cause of strife between the Africans and the British.

### **Role of Land**

Land confrontations led to a strain in the relations between European settlers and Africans, but also in the relationships among different African groups. For many groups in Kenya, land is the most important form of economic, social and political power. For the Kikuyu people, who constitute the largest share of any single ethnic group in Kenya, land is the single most important resource. In his book titled *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal life of the Kikuyu*, first Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta, said, the “Gikuyu people depend entirely on the land. It supplies them with the material needs of life, through which spiritual and mental contentment is achieved” (1962: 21). For the Kikuyu, who are agriculturalists, land is the “mother” of the tribe. It is by sharing the fruits of one’s labor that the Kikuyu gain status in their society. In pre-colonial Kenyan history, this would be extended into who could attain a position of power in Kikuyu culture (Kenyatta 1962: 55). The point here is to illustrate that land was critical to the existence of many African peoples. It held more significance to societies such as the Kikuyu as opposed to the Maasai, who are pastoralists (Ochieng 1985: 27). Land issues affected most indigenous societies, whether it was a lack of pastoral land or quality and sizeable land for cultivation.



Land alienation altered African lives. Not only did it dislocate them and disinherit their land, European settlement demanded African labor on that land. Before colonial governance, African people were highly self-sufficient and reliant on trade, but they did not participate in wage labor (Kanogo 1987: 1). The British settlers were in dire need of African labor in attempt to reach their economic goals. The colonial government implemented a number of financial and political measures to gain this labor, which Africans did not provide willingly (Kenyatta 1962). In order to interrupt 'traditional' order as Kenyatta described above, the British established taxes, created reserves and denied Africans the rights to grow major commercial crops (Kanogo 1987: 1). African life as it was known in the nineteenth century had drastically changed as the twentieth century was underway.

Not only were the effects of land alienation disruptive to African existence but the process itself was horrendous. The administrators processing European applications for land gave settlers authority over land with minimal fees. Overnight, many indigenous African no longer had land; some were landless without even receiving the stipulated payments for their land (Kanogo 1987). Kenyans experiencing land alienation either turned to squatting or kaffir farming. Squatting and kaffir farming meant working on European settler land to make a living with the possibility of gaining one's own land and cattle. These methods provided Africans an opportunity to gain power and autonomy, reducing European ability control of the labor force. Thus, these methods were abandoned and replaced with wage labor, which required Africans to work in order to make a living.

### **Women's Role in Kenyan History**

Throughout Kenya's history, women have played various roles assessing their needs and those of their families and acting accordingly. Women's activities have been both with men and



separately as well. In many representations of pre-colonial and colonial Kenya, we are not presented with women's participation outside the family nucleus, one example being Kenyatta's work on the Kikuyu (1962).

Kenyan women have actively participated in their history. One aspect of women's role in Kenyan history was their role in long distance trade, especially in the colonial period. Actually, only women took long distance trading trips in the colonial period. Even in times of warfare, women were respected among different indigenous groups, which allowed women to travel and exchange goods in distant areas with limited risk. Upon returning from their trade trips, women would decide how the materials they attained would be distributed (Presley 1992: 20-23). Trading gave women an area of autonomy, especially to older women without family responsibilities such as children. Even though this power may not have equaled that of men in social councils, it gave women status and respect in their communities. Women were not bystanders in Kenyan history. They participated in multiple ways such as trading and through women's organizations.

Throughout the twentieth century Kenyan women were involved in various forms of organizing that adapted to the changing nature of Kenyan life and the colonial state. One constant however was women councils. These councils were responsible for particular ceremonies in Kikuyu life such as purification rituals (Presley 1992). They also decided what punishments would be received by those who had done social injustices in society. Councils were and continue to be an arena for women to gather and discuss their concerns and the problems they faced. In the 1920s, women's protest concentrated on forced labor. In the earlier colonial period, men went into wage labor, which left women with the full responsibility of home production. But as time progressed, women were also required to work on settler farms,



along with their home duties (Presley 1992: 27-9). This lay a heavy burden on women, who complained accordingly. In this time period, they also protested for the release of Harry Thuku, an activist who rallied alongside women in their resistance to wage labor (ibid). Kenyan women actively participated in changing their lives as they experienced the negative effects of colonialism.

Women's activism in Kenya during the colonial period can be seen in three stages. The first stage was between the arrival of the British in the nineteenth century and the end of World War One. In this period, women and men resisted wage and communal labor. At this point, resistance was on an individual basis and not formal within communities. After World War One until 1947, activism focused on changing labor conditions and improving pay. This was accomplished individually, within ethnic groups and through political associations. The main protest in this time period was against the use of the Kipande, an identification card with someone's work history and status in any particular area outside the Reserves (Presley 1992).

In this second stage the colonial government began to accept the ideology of labor unions, as long as they were passive. Wages improved for some workers (Presley 1992: 68). Women's protest sometimes failed because they could not maintain strikes against their employers. Money had become an important commodity. Women needed it to pay taxes and avoid jail, pay for children's tuition and buy goods they could no longer cultivate for themselves. For these reasons, women often returned to work, making their protests ineffective.

The last stage was the post World War Two era when labor organizations grew and became effective. In the 1930s women became directly involved in protesting against the colonial governance because they felt that their male counterparts were not fighting against the oppression of colonialism. Some of the areas of oppression included the reduction in Kikuyu





land ownership, missionary attacks on female circumcision,<sup>3</sup> colonial state labor policies, high taxation and forced wage labor (ibid 27). Before the 1930s formal representation of complaints and protest came from mission and males in society. But in the 1930s, women began to speak their needs directly to authorities. The Mumbi Central Association was also established. This was a women's movement that paralleled that of men, which women were not allowed entry in. In spite of this, women forced entry into nationalist associations overtime (ibid 80). Women were able to penetrate men's nationalist associations because of their numerical strength. Upon entry, women actively participated in the movement towards independence.

### **Kenyan Women and the Mau Mau**

Presley (1992) states that women's role in the Mau Mau was critical and that without their participation it would have failed. Women participated as forest fighters, alongside men, they gathered food and disseminated information to those in the forests (Kanogo 1987: 143). Women in villages organized food production and networks to get that food to the fighters in the forest. Only women who had taken Mau Mau oaths<sup>4</sup> could participate in these delicate matters. As women delivered food, they also informed forest fighters about news in the village, i.e. where the British police were located and colonial plans to capture fighters.

The colonial state realized women's critical role in Mau Mau and began villagizations projects in the 1940s and 1950s to restrict their movement. These were virtual prison villages. There would be a fence around them and one was only allowed in and out under specific circumstances. These village prisons increased the danger of passing food and information to forest fighters, which in turn decreased contact between villagers and fighters in the forest

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<sup>3</sup> Female circumcision is a controversial topic. In this circumstance, it is mentioned to identify an area where women felt that power was being taken away from them.

<sup>4</sup> Taking an oath is what qualified someone to be involved in the Mau Mau Rebellion. It illustrated one's loyalty to an independent Kenyan and their willingness to protect the movement. See Presley 1992.



(Presley 1992: 155-170). Village prisons were effective in reducing the numbers in the Mau Mau Rebellion and its impact. In October 1952 the colonial government declared a state of Emergency to shut down the Mau Mau (Presley 1992, Ochieng 1985). It worked. This declaration quickly reduced Mau Mau activity.

The Emergency also gave the colonial state power to detain anyone regardless of probable cause. This detainment did not discriminate between men and women. A Mumbi Central Association leader illustrates this point, “Up until 1952 I was a leader. I was jailed in 1952 in Githunguri . . . because of being a politician . . . I stayed in jail for one month and two weeks. The second time I was taken to Kamiti; that was in 1953” (Presley 1992: 127). Women actively participated in the nationalist movement. Kamiti, the jail in which the leader of Mumbi Central Association was taken to is the highest maximum security prison in Kenya. Women activists were just as noticeable and active as men. Women were targets of the colonial state because of their involvement in secret oathing and the nationalist movement as a whole. In the 1950s, women’s investment in the independent movement was very much equal to men’s. The gendered roles of society that preceded this time momentarily decreased in importance. The Emergency was lifted in 1956.

After the turmoil of the 1940s and 1950s, the colonial government realized that an attempt to continue to control Kenya would be more exhaustive to British resources than the gains of colonial occupation. Between 1956 and 1960, Kenya was in a state of transition. In essence, the British had accepted defeat. However, nationalist movements were prepared to defend their rights if necessary (Kanogo 1987: Chapter 6).

After the realization that independence was approaching, the focus shifted from land disputes between the colonial state and Kenyan natives to the distribution of land in the post-



independent Kenya. In this spirit, two organizations rose out of the nationalist movement. One was the Kenyan African National Union (KANU), whose membership was predominantly Kikuyu, the largest ethnic group in Kenya. Other ethnic groups in Kenya feared control of the country and land by KANU and began the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) to give a voice to the non-majority. KADU advocated a multi-racial government instead of a strictly African majority state (Kanogo 1987: 166-7).

On December 12 1963, Kenya became independent. Many groups felt that Kenyatta, the first Kenyan president, had betrayed the freedom fighters. Land distribution was not equal among Kenyans. However, many squatters did gain land in the post independence era. Women's roles at this stage were not voiced. However, we can assume they felt as betrayed alongside the men who fought in the freedom struggle but did not gain what they felt was the rightful rewards.

### **Presidential Eras**

Since independence Kenya has had three presidents, Jomo Kenyatta (1963-78), Arap Moi (1968-2002) and Mwai Kibaki (2002-present). The two main social policy changes during Kenyatta's era were increased education and health care facilities. The goal of reduced literacy was accomplished, though not uniformly throughout the nation. In regards to political and national changes, Kenyatta's regime, especially in the 1970s, focused on "constitutional changes that helped them [Kenyatta and the ruling bourgeois] to consolidate political power and to impose their political and economical dominance on the state" (Ochieng 1995: 106). Kenyatta aimed to increase his rule and power, and in the process disregarded the ruling party, and in essence the Kenyan citizenry as well (Ochieng 1995).



Moi's rule between 1978 and 1988 was weighed down by economic difficulties and attempts to negotiate power with the Kenyan population. The economic problems were addressed through structural adjustment policies. It was smallholding farmers in rural areas that sustained the Kenyan economy (Nzomo & Nzomo 1994). As illustrated by Kenyatta's political agenda, the space between the governing body and the Kenyan citizenry had grown. During his first decade of rule, Moi attempted to tighten this relationship. However, this goal was not reached due to the abuse of power by members of government, for example the misappropriation of funds and favoritism (Ogot 1995: 208-213). A distrust of government also existed due to the rigging of elections during Moi's presidency (Nzomo & Staudt 1994). The corruption was further emphasized by the declaration of KANU as Kenya's only legal party in 1982.

The political climate for Kenyan citizens continued to deteriorate during Moi's presidency. The promises of independence had thus far been proven false. The general citizenry of Kenya was now marginalized. Large landowners and business men held political power due to the Presidents' (Kenyatta and Moi) interest in personal gain. Both Kenyatta and Moi aimed at increasing their wealth and supported rich men who helped reach that goal. Politics were not about parties and the well-being of the state but rather the personal connections one had to the ruling elite.





## **Women's Organizations: Meeting Their Own Needs**

As the theoretical chapter illustrates, women's role in the state is not centralized and often marginalized, especially in the African state. However, women do have agency and have directed it through women's organizations. In Kenya there are both formal and informal organizations. The focus here will be on MYW and GBM, two national women's organizations. Understanding them both helps illustrate the various ways in which women, through organizations, have related to the state. MYW, through its leadership, exemplifies an organization closely tied to the state and some of the outcomes of that relationship overtime. Conversely, the GBM has often been in opposition with the state. This case provides some of the gains and losses in being 'anti-state.' But the GBM, regardless of its relationship with the state has prospered, including its founder winning the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize. The examples illustrate both women that interact directly with government and their general membership that to a major degree supplements some of the needs the government does not meet.

### **MYW**

In discussing MYW, I will discuss its relation to the state, both in the colonial and post-colonial period. MYW illustrates some of the ways in which women were directly involved with the state. One way to understand this relationship is through a study of the leaders of the organizations, especially in the early years, when MYW was able to accomplish some of its goals, unlike its later years where bureaucracy overcame the organization. By understanding this organization's workings, we can better understand the type of role women were expected to play versus those they played, especially as it related to their newly gained independence in 1963.

MYW is one of the oldest women's organizations on the Continent of Africa (Likimani 1985: 30). It was founded in 1952 by European colonial officers' wives and relatives (ibid;



Aubrey 1997: 45). It is not coincidental that this was the same year the British colonial government declared a state of Emergency in Kenya. MYW received official recognition from the colonial state at its inception with the expectation to suppress the rise of Kenyan nationalism by 'culturing' Kenyan women correctly (Aubrey 1995: 46). MYW attempted to restrain the nationalism movement by teaching African women domestic and social skills (Wipper 1975: 100). These would include home science, craft work etc. The philosophy behind the European women's actions and goals was to teach African women the 'right' way of being a woman. It aimed at rehabilitating the 'backwardness' of Kenyan women, who were participating in the Mau Mau Rebellion and other forms of the nationalist movement, into 'good women' (Likimani 1985: 30). The early goal of MYW was to attempt to shift Kenyan women from the nationalist movement and reduce their participation in it. But as the historical chapter illustrates, this goal was not always reached. Women continued to be involved in the nationalist movement.

One of the main ways MYW was able to increase its membership was by bribing women with necessities for survival. Throughout the colonial period and leading to the declaration of the Emergency in 1952, land alienation had greatly affected women's source of food and many came to depend on organizations such as MYW for sustenance (Rocheleau et al 1996: 128). MYW functioned as a colonial state agency by requiring women to renounce the Mau Mau, the nationalist movement and to surrender secret information regarding oaths before giving women the aid they so direly needed to sustain their families. MYW was acting as a political agent in its colonial era by aiding in the reduction of nationalist activity (Presley 1992: 166).

The first president of MYW was Nancy Shepherd, a granddaughter to one of the earliest missionaries in Kenya. Shepherd's leadership illustrated an undisputable connection between



MYW and the colonial government. She was "the colonial supervisor of MYWO's activities" (Aubrey 1997: 46). Her roles as Assistant Minister for Women and Girls and later on as Assistance Minister of Community Development and Rehabilitation in the Department of Community Development both demonstrated the explicit collaboration with the colonial government in these early years (ibid). According to Aubrey, there is also a wealth of information in colonial archives showing that "MYWO was, in fact, an informant organization and part and parcel of the colonial police state" (ibid 47).

While the colonial government and MYW leaders were striving to eliminate the nationalist movement through women's participation in MYW clubs, African women within the organization arranged a removal of British leadership and a change in MYW goals. This occurred in 1961 at the annual general meeting. The membership voted out the British leadership and changed MYW policies towards benefiting African women, who constituted the majority of the membership in the organization. Phoebe Asiyo became the first Kenyan president of MYW at this meeting.

This change is not shocking considering the reasons Kenyan women joined MYW. First, as earlier discussed, women joined MYW for family sustenance (Presley 1992: 166). It was only a last alternative to the lack of food for self-sustenance (Nzomo 1989: 10). Beforehand women had been struggling to start their own organizations, which did not succeed highly due to a lack of finances (Aubrey 1997: 52). Basically, living in colonial conditions made it difficult for African women to initiate a large organization such as MYW. Therefore, African women entered the organization in aims of working the networks towards their own benefits, as the 1961 annual meeting illustrated.



## **The Two Divisions of MYW**

Before discussing the leaders of MYW post independence, it is important to differentiate the two divisions that operate within MYW. After independence, there were, and continues to be, two distinct factions of women that operated within MYW, though on different levels and with different agendas. One consists of the women at the national level. These women focus on formulating development, the execution of that development and handling the financial sector of the organization by attracting funding and distributing it throughout the local groups within Kenya, or at least that's the goal. The definition of development is crucial to this discussion and proves to represent different ideas for the two groups. For the women on the national and leadership level, their development and accomplishment has been measured by funding one attracts and the outcome of their relationships with the state.

The second group consists of women at the local level, which I refer to as the grassroots level. Grassroots level women concentrate in improving their localities i.e. rural areas and villages (Aubrey 1995: 15). Grassroots women are more focused on activity that will improve their areas more than the money flowing through. Yes, the money is important to them but it is only a means to an end, not the end itself. MYW women in the grassroots work directly with the people their organization is trying to help. Their work has a face on it. Their actions have an immediate impact, which makes their decision-making and agenda setting differ from MYW women at the national level.

## **Post-Colonial Governance**

The goal during Asiyo's governance was the improvement of the impoverished lives Kenyan women endured during the colonial period. The change in leadership during the colonial period had a great impact on the relationship between the colonial government and MYW.





MYW declared itself an autonomous organization from the state. The colonial state lost control of the organization. In astonishment and anger, British colonial power evicted MYW out of the government owned buildings where its headquarters were located (Aubrey 1997: 52-3). In this early takeover of MYW by Kenyan women the main focus was autonomy from the state and separation from the colonial state over any other agenda. This was greatly due to the increased nationalist movement in Kenya and the approach of independence in 1963 (Ochieng 1985). The tension between Africans and the British were high, both for men and women. Therefore, an organization that Kenyan women could control for themselves was fundamental (Aubrey 1997: 53).

After Asiyo, leadership of MYW was under Jael Mbogo, 1963-7, immediately following independence. Mbogo helped garner the support of governmental officials. This was a positive sign for MYW because it showed potential for continued government support of its work. It is important to note that Mbogo was more concerned with her ability to keep a link with the government than in the progress of Kenyan women as a whole.

Elizabeth Mwenda succeeded Mbogo and chaired the organization from 1967-8. Under her leadership, MYW gained 50,000 new members and began approximately 17,000 nursery schools. In this time, the government continued to cooperate with MYW and its agenda. Both Mwenda and Mbogo's time as presidents of MYW show a shift in the relationship with the state. In the beginning of MYW, British women were extremely connected to the colonial state. After the takeover by Kenyan women, the organization declared itself autonomous from the state. It was able to keep this status until independence because it was fighting against the colonial state. However, when Jomo Kenyatta became the first president of Kenya, MYW's relationship with the state was expected and did begin to change.



First of all, due to its organizing of women to protest against the colonial government, MYW expected to play a major role in the government, which it did in the early time period. However, it did not endorse a particular political party, a decision made under Asiyo's leadership (Aubrey 1997: 54). Therefore, it managed to remain politically unbiased to some degree. But the close financial relationship that MYW began to share with the government after 1963 did not always allow it to be autonomous in all its decisions. After all, it was receiving aid from the government. MYW leadership seemed to focus its attention more on government relationships than the furthering of Kenyan women in rural areas (ibid 55).

Nonetheless, the relationship with the state changed again with Mrs. Ruth Habwe's leadership, 1968-71. Habwe continued to increase MYW membership. She aimed to assist rural Kenyan women and not MYW relationship with the state, like previous presidents. It is in Habwe's leadership that we begin to see MYW pressuring the post-colonial government. In 1968's annual meeting, the membership of MYW passed numerous resolutions "concerning the rights and demands of women," such as equal employment with men and an increase in the number of women who could attend the University of Nairobi (ibid 56). In Habwe's time, women began self help groups. With MYW as an umbrella organization, women began separate organizations for saving, where women rotated to help one another build roofs and accomplish other projects that required a large sum of money. Basically, women agree to each contribute a certain amount each month, and one person gets the money each time they meet. This tool helps women have a sphere of their own and also accomplish some of the goals that are difficult without a large sum of money. Habwe's time as MYW president had an impact on the everyday Kenyan woman in the rural area.



After Habwe, Jane Kiano took over the leadership of MYW between 1971 and 1984. She is commended as being one of the most important leaders of MYW for her ability to balance the complex relationships in which an NGO must engage. She was able to assess the role of the government, the needs of rural women in Kenya, while maintaining relationships with international donors. Kiano was able to secure relative success for MYW. The organization's membership increased, though this was not difficult for most MYW presidents. One of the marked differences between Kiano's chairing and that of past MYW was the support she received from the state. While past leaders had to struggle to attract and maintain governmental support, Mrs. Kiano received state backing in a large capacity. This was partially due to her husband's role as chairman of one of Kenya's largest television stations, KBC and as Minister of Commerce in early post-colonial Kenya. This is an illustration of a woman's access to power through a man and not through her own right.

Kiano was seen as both successful and unsuccessful. Her successes and shortcomings can be observed through the two distinct factions of the MYW described earlier. During Kiano's leadership the MYW headquarters, costing an approximate 1.6 million dollars was built (Aubrey 1997: 57). In order to facilitate that project, Kiano and MYW had the support of its national level membership, strong governmental support, local bank support, voluntary groups and international bodies all in favor of the building and the programs it would bring forth. However, this project was not beneficial to "ordinary Kenyan women" who did not live nor interact with the newly built facility. The headquarters building in Nairobi, Kenya was a turning point for MYW. An expensive building in Nairobi does not address the issues faced by grassroots women.



While the headquarters was not a success to all, Kiano had some successes. Her personal leadership style was effective for the organization. She utilized her relationships with women prior to her presidency with MYW to further the organization as needed. Kiano's ability to network helped MYW, though the two factions have a difference of opinion, such as the building of the headquarters building, which required tremendous support. Many of the reasons MYW was successful in its goals during Kiano's leadership was due to her personal connections, such as that with President Kenyatta and her husband's ability to get money to MYW while he was a cabinet member (Aubrey 1997).

During Kiano's leadership MYW adopted a non-confrontational relationship with the state. The organization did not confront nor challenge the Kenyan government. Kiano's ability to interact with the country's president was due to the lack of confrontation and radical ideas that were, in previous MYW presidencies, expressed towards men and the government. This leadership can be contrasted with Habwe's, who demanded equality for women, even in government roles. Kiano's leadership style, though useful in some aspects, was undoing some of the achievements made during Habwe's presidency. In fact, Kiano was taking MYW back to its roots, when European women, along with the colonial state, aimed at feminizing Kenya women according to European expectations. In Kiano's era, it was rare that the organization had any agenda for women outside of those related to homemaking. When it did step outside homemaking, MYW attempted to do so in the most "feminine," unthreatening manner possible, so as to avoid tampering the relationship MYW (i.e. Kiano) shared with President Kenyatta and the government (Aubrey 1997: 58). For the grassroots faction of MYW, Kiano's leadership years brought forth minimal gains. By putting her main focus on MYW's relationship with the state, she disregarded the needs of ordinary women in Kenya.





Another success for Kiano was her fundraising abilities. She was able to attract non-African, elite, women in Kenya into the organization, bringing their wealth into the organizations. Kiano's connections and personal networking brought MYW great financial support. However, these donors did not give to MYW because they believed in its agendas. They donated because of Kiano. Due to this, consistent funding was problematic.

While Kiano's approach to government did have its downfalls for Kenyan women, it was a calculated move once contextualized in Kenya's political status at the time. First of all, Kenya was still a young post-colonial state. Consequently, the government had not yet fully established itself. As a result, any attacks on the government would have produced a negative outcome for the organization. If Kiano, as the head MYW representative, criticized the young, unstable state of Kenya, there would have been a marginal chance of governmental support in MYW agenda, which would have reduced MYW activity due to the funds received from the state. At the same time, one cannot ignore the fact that this approach did limit the breadth of MYW's agendas. The organization could not explicitly oppose state ideas nor bring forth strategic gender issues, such as women's rights. Then the question becomes, if the organization cannot explicitly fight for women's rights, what is it fighting for and is it worth it?

After Kiano, MYW began to be taken over by the state. Kiano's presidency was succeeded by her vice-president, Theresa Shitakha in 1984, who was corrupt and ousted from her post shortly after (Aubrey 1997: 67). The Kenyan state had been attempting to involve itself in MYW so as to gain funds through it. With the failure and corruption of Shitakha, the state investigated her and assumed MYW affairs to ensure 'fairness' within the organization. The government had a committee working to redraft MYW's constitution, changing it from an NGO to a "women's development body of KANU [ruling party]" (ibid 70). In essence MYW became



adopted as a government agency. The organization continues to be involved in working with the state and also women in the grassroots. However, its relevance and significance to Kenyan women has drastically reduced.

In the years in which I have covered MYW's leadership, we envision a rollercoaster of an organization. One that had the capability to influence and fight for women's rights but has instead decided to align with the state, which has only used the organization for its own gain. I stop my assessment of leaders at this point because women's gains through MYW after its adoption with the state have been minimal.

### **The Green Belt Movement**

With the planting of a small tree nursery in the backyard of her bungalow, Wangari Maathai took the first step to what would later be known as the Green Belt Movement. Envirocare, the original name of the NGO, began in 1977, with the intention of promoting tree-planting among residents within Kenya's capital Nairobi. African states experienced threat of desertification in the 1980s that endangered the well being of the continent's environment. Envirocare along with the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) joined to fight this issue through an NGO called "Save the Land Harambee." This organization began tree planting campaigns of woodlots containing at least 1,000 trees, referred to as green belts, and thus the Green Belt Movement began. In GBM's early years, it received seedlings free of charge from the Forestry Department of Kenya but this relationship eventually become sour and GBM found other sources for its seedlings. As GBM continued to grow, it extended its work into rural Kenya, helping agricultural based women to learn about the environment and how best to preserve it. Today, its efforts, through Wangari Maathai, are being spread across the globe (Maathai 2003).



One of GBM's primary goals is to promote an environmentally sound ethic in Kenya that protects the greenery that sustains the people of Kenya, with a special focus on women. The tree planting project involves ten steps that each GBM tree-planting group must accomplish before receiving the monetary rewards for their efforts. Through the educational process from the tree planting programs and the access to knowledge that rural women gain, GBM accomplishes its goals of empowering women and giving them purpose in their work and most importantly in their daily lives. GBM has empowered Kenyans to lead advocacy activities that concern their communities

While GBM aims to improve the deforestation and environmental concerns, it is imperative to recognize this is part of its mobilization. GBM's work in rural areas transforms women's lives. First, they are empowered through information and positions available at nurseries. Secondly, tree planting improves women's economic lives. With tree planting of green belts and monitoring for six months, nursery groups become eligible for their monetary rewards. This incentive leads women to inquire about GBM because it provides a consistent income. Poor women in Kenya gain a great opportunity towards autonomy through organizations such as the GBM (Jetter 1997: 72-73). GBM succeeds in its empowerment and environmental goals for the people, especially women, of Kenya.

GBM realized the manipulation of NGOs by the Moi regime and worked alongside other NGOs to publicize these atrocities and promote democracy. As much as this was not a battle by GBM alone, it is an example of how GBM policies help mobilize the general citizenry of Kenya. As a consequence of GBM's participation in raising awareness, it was able to destabilize Kenyans' acceptance of a corrupt government system and produce a multi-party system, 1991-2 (Nzomo 1998: 169). GBM was instrumental in political empowerment during the early 1990s by



educating Kenyan citizens about candidates and their positions. GBM was not only satisfied with the move towards a multi-party system of government, but also ensuring that Kenya's citizens could take full advantage and participate in elections.

Both MYW and GBM provide examples of organizations in Kenya that have aimed in reaching Kenyan women but yet the outcomes differ greatly. MYW illustrates governance mostly unconcerned with the needs of its constituency and more with its relationship to the state. On the other hand, GBM illustrates an organization that has aimed to hold true to its goals regardless of the political backlash that it may receive. Each organization has had its positive and negative moments but GBM's strategy proves to outdo that of the MYW.

Power is an important aspect to explore here. Many of MYW leaders were interested in enhancing their positions of power and the power of the organization internationally and with the government. These interests did not always conform to those of its constituency. To many, MYW has become irrelevant. After its close relations and alignment with the state, it is not trusted by many. It continues to be an organization but reach of the everyday Kenyan woman is not accounted for.

Conversely, GBM has focused on putting power in the hands of its members. Through tree-planting programs it has been able to grant economic, social and political power to its constituency. Its members are being empowered through their participation in the organization. Women involved with GBM are better able to make autonomous decisions in a patriarchal society. Their agency, through participation in the GBM is increased and utilized.





## Conclusion

This research looked at the relationship between Kenyan women and the state during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has accomplished this task through a comprehensive analysis of women's roles in history in relation to the state and an examination of two women focused organizations in Kenya. Below is a table that provides the critical junctures for both MYW and GBM. This table helps visualize some of the reasons why each organization had the particular outcomes it did.

Table 1

### Maendeleo Ya Wanawake

Year	Event
1952	MYW is founded by British Colonial Officers wives and relatives to help Kenyan women learn how to be 'civilized'.
<b>1961</b>	Kenyan women overthrow British leadership and takeover MYW.
1963	Kenya becomes independent. Kenyatta becomes the first president.
1978	Daniel Moi becomes the second Kenyan president.
<b>1971-1984</b>	Jane Kiano chairs MYW, having the most successful leadership on record thus far.
1986	MYW chair is formally dismissed and caretaker committee is assigned to the organization.
<b>1987</b>	MYW is formally associated with KANU, the ruling party in Kenya at the time.

### The Green Belt Movement

Year	Event
1963	Kenya becomes independent. Kenyatta becomes the first president.
1977	Envirocare, the first name of GBM, is started.
1980s	Envirocare and the National Council of Kenyan Women work together to build 'green belts.' The GBM is born.
<b>1986</b>	GBM begins to share its strategies to African countries outside Kenya, and has expanded internationally overtime.
<b>1991-2</b>	Kenya returns to a multi-party system. GBM is involved in the political protest of the previously one-party system. The organization practices political autonomy from the state.
1999	GBM initiates a strategic planning program.
<b>2004</b>	Wangari Maathai is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.



This table illustrates the historical moments that led MYW to its decline and GBM to its prosperity. The purpose of this study has been to understand Kenyan women's historical relationship with the state and look into what the future holds for them. Below are the conclusions I draw from this study.

The first outcome of this work is the recognition of women's position in relation to the Kenyan state. The historical analysis chapter illustrates the many ways in which Kenyan women were involved in the nationalist movement with minimal gains, as compared to their male counterpart. Furthermore, their fight for democracy and a multi-party system in the 1990s did not yield results of representation of women and their issues in the state. Simply speaking, the Kenyan woman has worked to aid her country but the results have not been widespread for the everyday, non-elite Kenyan woman. The point here is to state that Kenyan women should recognize their marginalized and used role in relation to the state. In the pre-colonial era, they were used for their strength in numbers and to gain independence. In the post-colonial era, MYW was used to give political standing for the Presidents. In other words, Kenyan women should be sceptical of their state and its ignorance of their world.

Secondly, this research illustrates the need for women's organizations to carefully negotiate their relationship with the state. MYW illustrates an organization that has lost its purpose by aligning with the state to the point of compromising its goals. In contrast, GBM shows the outcome of scepticism with the state. GBM has always challenged state actions and stood its position in its beliefs. This has produced strength for the organization to stay focused on its goals, the environment and empowerment, instead of political relationships. A low level of congruence between the GBM and the state has equalled little support from the government. This has meant extra efforts for funding for the GBM. This effort has paid off by providing the



organization with an opportunity to focus on its goals and be independent of the state. Both these organizations have had their ups and downs, but clearly the GBM has ended up ahead and its relationship, or lack thereof, with the state has been instrumental in that success.

While Kenyan women are operating in a patriarchal society, much like the rest of the world, they still have agency and power to improve their lives. It is up to them to find these opportunities and make the best of them. First of all, Kenyan women, rich and poor, urban and rural, are half of the Kenyan citizenry. They have the power of numbers. However, they are not well organized as a group. If they are to progress and gain major strides, they need to unite and work together. The needs of each woman in different contexts vary, but a uniting thread must be found in order to have a movement that prevails. The past shows they have united together for common goals. It is now time to find common goals and a uniting ground.

Kenyan women have fought hard to be where they are today. History has proved to marginalize their position with each passing year. However, they have continued to strive to improve their positions, even though not always on a nationally organized level: women in rural areas work together to ease the hardships of their economic lives, urban women are doing the same both in the economic and political arena. While the problems women face are not the same from one context to another, they all have needs not being met by the state, whether it is rights over a deceased husband's property or physical abuse or lack of food. Kenyan women must continue the work they are doing now, but also find methods of increasing their ability to disturb the current structures of patriarchy. While survival is important, bigger strides are needed.



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